

PBM26 Report – 55th Punchbowl Marathon – 8th February 2026

The day went well, and the going was much the same as last year – mostly dry. The day was calm and mostly overcast. This year slightly under 80% of entrants started (292 of 378), and 278 were awarded Certificates.

This year the event limit was kept at 400, but unlike 2025 it was not oversubscribed. While 402 entered in total, a trickle of cancellations reduced this to 378 potential starters. Of these, just under 77.5% (292) started even though the weather and conditions were quite benign. Fabian4 recorded no weather related route changes this year (just one to the 20 and one to the 30, both long before the event). On the day a few downgraded from 30 to 20, and proportionately a lot more on the 30 just did not show up. So while Fabian had 172 on the 20, 147 (just over 85.5%) started. Conversely Fabian had 205 on the 30, but only 145 (just over 70%) started.

Runner Unfriendliness: On the 30 mile route 4 runners in total were disqualified as they missed the turn and bypassed CP3 (Seale Village Hall) while only using GPX to guide them. Last year, 3 were disqualified for the same reason – and this probably has influenced why total entry numbers were down from last year.

To stop the PBM getting a worsening reputation and completely putting off this welcome class of entrant some mitigation is needed. We already place cones and “runners in road” signage along the road after Kettlebury Hill up to ‘Little Pitch’ (though that is more for drivers not on the event). In future we need to routinely place cones and signage at the road junction in Seale to direct such runners to CP3.

NB: In previous years we also disqualified runners who missed CP2, but now ensure there is signage outside Little Cowdray Farm so runners do not miss that CP!

Discretionary completions: three certificates were awarded to people who finished at 18:04 (AFTER 6PM) but within the 10.5 hours maximum. Alan Stewart was also awarded one as he finished at 17:59. He was let through Start at 07:27, and so took 10 hours and 32 minutes (longer than the Challenge strictly allows).

Retirements: Excluding the 4 DQs above, there were 10 retirements. Three at the start, one on the 20 and two on the 30. Two knew they were injured, but were hoping for the best – soon realising they had to return to the Start rather than struggle to CP1. The other retiree did not even reach Start after registering before having a call to tell them they were needed elsewhere. The other 7 to retire were all on the 30, and retired at CP3. Interestingly, they all retired slightly before the CP3 closing time of 16:45. Perhaps fitness was also the issue for these entrants.

Route Changes: the flood route on the 30 mile route west of Elstead has been removed! The 30 route switched bridges at Elstead to instead cross the drier eastern one. The other major change (on both routes) was to drop down into the Devils Punchbowl shortly after passing the viewpoint. To compensate for the reduction in both distance and wide ranging views, the route across Hankley Common was changed to pass the Atlantic Wall to visit Lion’s Mouth before turning south along the sandy rim.

Marshal changes: three marshal roles (two for the Numbers Check, one for the Splits) were abolished this year, and weren’t missed. While there could be a Numbers Check in future, route layout, entrant self discipline (or is that runners blindly follow the GPX?) and their widespread use of Apps such as Strava mean that entrants who do deviate from the route really don’t intend to do so.

PACER: again no reliability problems this year. The new hosting service definitely seems to have improved reliability. Due to this only one (experienced) timing marshal was needed at CP3 as entrants arrive so spaced out. Thanks to Tim Bedwell for again acting as standby in case PACER required a restart.

Car Parking Problems: The final details for any event using Tilford VH need to make clear that the Parking is on private land that will be locked before 6:30 and at 19:00 (unless being held open for late finishers). As this wasn't stated, some entrants arrived before 6:30, before the Car Park Team, etc. had been fully set up. Also, after finishing, one entrant left their car there and went for a meal in the pub! Fortunately for them, they came back just before we all drove away after locking the gates about 8PM.

Kit: mostly worked out well. As last year, most kit (Thanks Mike) was dropped off at Tilford on Saturday night, with CP1 and CP3 leads collecting their crates on Sunday morning. However, CP1 asked for about 3 times as much water than was needed (containers filled by John Goody Goody on Saturday and delivered to the CP1 location early on the morning). After the event one of the CP First Aid Kits was found to have gone missing and it could not be traced. In future these will have to be individually labelled.

Tilford VH only had one electric urn (two last year), but this didn't seem to cause a problem as it could be refilled by boiling kettles.

Provisions: At Seale VH and Tilford VH, Toilet Rolls were again underestimated, but as last year, the Tilford Hall Marshal (Alastair) bought extras on the way in.

In summary, almost everything worked well again this year. No changes are needed to how we use and set up the various venues (booking times, what we get, re-usable floor sheeting for Tilford, etc.). However, a few issues (see above) do need to be addressed for next time.

The 28 strong 2026 Marshal team (some of whom had multiple roles) were:

Roger Sage, Stuart Hilton, John Preston, Tony Cartwright, John Goody, Stewart Hilton, Elton Ellis, Paul Chamberlain, Bill Boughton, Richard Ireson, Avril Stapleton, Stephen Ford, Alan Shons, Ertan Ali Falk, Jude Unsworth, Mike Tuke, Geoff Bullock, Matt Carolan, Tim Bedwell, Jackie Barker, Ted Swift, David Boyce, James Blogg, Alastair Charlesworth, Jennie de Bossart, Henri de Bossart, Cathy Turton, Sue Charlesworth.

Additionally, while Ann Muggeridge had to drop out, she had done sterling work setting up PACER and the cards for the entrants. As always, Mike Tuke was both a marshal on the day and provided invaluable help managing the Surrey kit store, organising and supplying the kit needed at each location, and afterwards taking it back to – and re-organising it back in - the Surrey kit store.

Facebook comments by entrants included:

Great to be out all day with no rain, little mud to speak of and fantastic views, packed with excellent volunteers taking care of you from start to the finish....

Thanks so much for a fantastically organised day in every way. Amazing!

Really enjoyed today on the 20 mile walk of Punchbowl marathon

Thoroughly enjoyed the 30 miles, thank you for hosting this fabulous event

Surrey Group, you legends!!!!